

flow

Del Doughty

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Once again for

Leah,

Dark Lady of the Haiku

deep cold—
a pack of pink cosmos seeds
comes in the mailbox

my wife shows me
a small bloom
on the hyacinth
by light from the snow

I ask "how was it?"
"Good," she says, turning
on the lamp. "And you?"

cars idle in their own exhaust
at the drive-thru—
black snow, piled high.

pause in the sermon:
melting snow splatters
from the eaves

Followers of the Way

Martin Luther King Day:
it's still snowing
after the convocation

Back before the war began in March, I caught myself rambling around the house worrying about bombs and anthrax attacks and I often pictured myself in the kitchen, huddled under the window strapped airtight with duct tape and sheets of clear plastic. But one night, while I was sweeping crumbs from under the oven, it occurred to me that God's got good people everywhere, people like those Hebrew midwives in Exodus, whose names don't make the news but who are everywhere to be found, and so it happened that I began to replace my vague, nervous musings with little mental pictures of kind old women from my church.

One at a time,
along their invisible path—
ants in the kitchen.

Break in the rain—
mud oozes through the fingers
of squatting boys

Classroom window sill—
pinto beans sprout in a row
of paper cups.

Boys in the treehouse
draw moustaches and fangs on
girls in their yearbook

Tight-bellied teenage girls
tan on the sun-warped boards
of the neighbor's deck

The wide ocean:
my wife twists her wet hair
into a ponytail

In church I see the light
catch the anklet
on her suntanned leg

Flow

"Yet we cannot reach happiness by consciously searching for it."

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

Saturday morning: Two chapters into Csikszentmihalyi and I'm eager to engineer flow for my kids, whom I've neglected while chasing yet another new idea. Today, I decide, we are going to paint. I load them into the minivan, drive into the city. At the art supply store we wander long aisles of brushes, color tubes, crayons, cuts of paper. Finally, each boy chooses a paint-by-number. At the checkout lane the middle boy wants a chocolate bar. I say "no, not now," and I repeat these words several times, as calmly as possible, against the rising water of his wrath. When the levee bursts I am soaked through with his screams, fists, mad flailings. Back in the car I stare straight ahead and clench the wheel, and at home I can do nothing but shake my head and sigh as the boys swirl paint around their cardboard canvases, oblivious to the numbers and the light-blue contour lines.

at the window-
pane, gazing at the rain—
seamless gray skies

That night the sink clogs. I suspect the kids, blame them, then plunge the drain to no avail. Half a bottle of Liquid Plumber returns only a burning sulphurous stench and a bunch of black flakes, a dandruff of rusted calcium deposits. I go to the store and buy a plumber's snake, which knocks loose the clog, yes, but which bores through the rusted trap. I go back to the store to buy a new trap, return, and while removing the old trap I inadvertently snap off the corroded tailpiece that connects to it. So I go back to the store. Now it's deep into Sunday morning. I am tired but I am not going to sleep until I am done with the sink. I am immersed in pipes and joints, the smells of grease and putty. I am in the flow.

so clear and so cool
I drink water straight
from the bathroom tap

New Coolness

Coolness—
rooftops moist
with morning dew.

Nearly midnight and only just now Leah is laying out Luke's clothes and packing his new black backpack with crayons and glue and plastic scissors. I say something about summer passing so quickly.

"I can't believe he's already starting school," she says.

"I know. Man, where does the time go?"

Lying in bed a little later with the light off she confesses her concerns about how well he'll get along.

Now in the morning when the school bus comes we're sitting on the porch steps with cooling cups of coffee, smiling and waving and wondering if he should have worn a jacket, wondering if he's had enough breakfast to last him til lunchtime.

the kids at the back of the bus
make faces at the cars
new coolness

A red SUV
parked at the tanning salon—
autumn afternoon.

flowering
the
new
squarely

field
farmer's
fenceposts
staked

September 11, 2001

A faint taste of dirt
still on the radish—
funeral lunch

Most of the cars at Wal-Mart
have American flags;
autumn clarity

September 11, 2003

Leaves at their peak;
everyone I meet says "Hey,
you got a haircut!"

brown leaves rising again a cold wind

a "cut-up" haiku
from an article by Verlyn Klinkenborg
in his *New York Times* column

Change

Nine at night I'm in line to buy diapers at Kroger. The old couple ahead of me in their moldy clothes counting browned pennies. The clerk, his eyes averted, tells them "no," not enough, and the old folks fumble a moment, chuckle an apology, throw their loaf of bread off the conveyor belt. I offer to float them the difference, but no, they say, we've gotta go, and they scamper out of the store, their step quick as the nip in the evening air.

My turn. The clerk scans my diapers and recites the price. I'd like, I say, to buy those folks that loaf of bread. The clerk snaps his hand and gives the command to the bagger to go and fetch a new loaf. But isn't it just right here, I say, motioning under the counter? The clerk shows me the loaf he'd thrown in the trash. "Store policy," he says. I shrug and hand him a Hamilton.

waiting for my change—
the store clerk and I talk
about the wind tonight



Del Doughty's first collection of haiku, *The Sound of Breathing* (Saki Press, 2000) won the Virgil Hutton Memorial Prize in 2000, and he has received funding from the Indiana Arts Commission, the Indiana General Assembly, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature from The Pennsylvania State University and currently teaches English at Huntington College in Huntington, Indiana.

"Doughty is a craftsman who knows what is well made and exactly where to place the one small imperfection that will make us cherish his whole work. This is an impressively coherent collection of parts, producing something greater—something living."

John Stevenson

"*Flow* is the perfect title for Del Doughty's collection of haiku and haibun. He provides ordinary-extraordinary examples of the Flow: oozing mud, kitchen ants, paint onto canvas, tap water, a stopped drain, traffic in a drive-thru, a grocery-store queue, . . . indeed our very life itself. This is a finely conceived and executed work."

Charles Trumbull

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